Interview with CDR Owedia (Tweedie) Searcy, NC, USN (Ret.) Navy nurse anesthetist during the Vietnam War. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian of the Navy Medical Department, 12 December 2003, Annapolis, MD.

Where were you born?
I was born in Venus, TX, June 6, 1923.

When did you decide you wanted to be a nurse?
It was at an early age. When I graduated from high school, my mother and dad knew the director of one of the hospitals in Fort Worth, but I decided I wanted to go to a different hospital so we had a few words about that. I did what I wanted to do and went to St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Fort Worth, TX.

How many year course was that?
Three. I graduated from nurse's training, and the first few months after I graduated, there was a polio epidemic in Fort Worth and I went over to the hospital and worked a number of months. I had already been accepted for anesthesia school at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis so I made a little extra money with the polio epidemic and went on to Barnes Hospital for my anesthesia training.

Why did you decide on anesthesia?
I decided it would either be anesthesia or physical therapy. I wrote two letters. The letter that came back with an answer first, I would accept. The anesthesia letter came back first because one of the doctors in the hospital knew that that letter went out and he phoned the director of the anesthesia program to get me accepted because they needed anesthetists in our hospital. So that's how I went.

How many years did you work at the hospital?
After I came back from anesthesia training, I worked a year and a half, and then I got mad at one of the nuns for something. So I went over to the Air Station in Dallas and signed up to join the Navy Nurse Corps.

Why the Navy?
I liked the uniforms better [laughter].

How did one sign up for the Navy back then?
I had to fill out a lot of papers. I had to have a physical. The Bureau [BUMED] wanted a little thesis on why I wanted to join the Navy Nurse Corps. I can't remember why I was so smart as such an early age. I wrote on the piece of paper that I wanted to make the Navy a career--which I did.

What year was that?
That was 1948. I got a set of orders to the Navy hospital in Houston. There was a brand-new Navy hospital built in Houston. It should have been built in New Orleans because that's where the Navy was. There was not one thing Navy in Houston. But politics got it built. That

was kept open for 3 years and then we turned it over to the Veterans Administration. And it's still the Veterans Hospital in Houston today.

When you joined the Navy in 1948, was there any kind of orientation as to how you wore the uniform, marching, etc.? Did you join one day and were a full-fledged Navy nurse the next?

We had a Navy nurse who was in charge of all the indocrinees. She taught us all the in's and out's of what to do in the Navy and how to do it. And how to wear the uniform. We had a Marine enlisted man who came over to teach us how to march. There were six in my class. There were five other nurses who came from the same nursing school in Minnesota, and me, a Texan, which made the sixth.

Well, that poor Marine used the basement under the nurses' quarters. And it had these poles to keep the building from falling down. So we would start out toward the Marine, then all of a sudden there'd be a couple of these poles that we had to get around. So he would yell directions and we would have to turn to the right or the left, or go backward, or some such thing. And that's how we learned to march. And this went on for several weeks. I think he had to keep adding on a few weeks because we were so darn dumb and kept bumping into those poles. That Marine must have had white hair when he finished with us.

So that was your first duty station. How long were you there?

One year. I was an anesthetist, and there was one other anesthetist by the name of Agnes Shurr, who had just finished anesthesia training at Baylor. Also there was a Dr. Spence who was a surgeon and he had been helping out with anesthesia. When I came, he taught me how to do spinals. That was because the Navy used spinals in so many cases. Dr. Spence didn't want to keep doing spinals so he taught spinal anesthesia to Aggie and me. And that's how it all got started.

What types of anesthetic were you using then?

Pontocaine for spinals. We also had nitrous oxide and C3H6 and curare for muscle relaxant. When I went through anesthesia training, I was taught how to do intubations. And then when I came back to Fort Worth to work in my old hospital, the other four anesthetists did not know how to do intubations. So then I got all the hard cases for thyroidectomies and patients who were going to be on their stomach for surgery. I got all those cases because I could throw a tube in the trachea and make it much easier to give the anesthesia.

Where did you go after Houston?

I got orders to Bethesda. Here I am a boot ensign going to Bethesda. There was one other Navy nurse, a senior girl who had been in during the war and her name was Walchek. There were three or four junior doctors in the department and we all took a night of call a week. I decided after a while that Bethesda was a horrible place and I didn't care for what went on in the department.

So I went downtown to see the Director of the Navy Nurse Corps and she gave me a set of orders to someplace else.

What was it about Bethesda that you didn't like?

The doctors all chose their cases. And then some of the messy ones they'd give to the nurses.

What do you mean by messy cases?

They weren't the nice cases--rectal cases and things like that. We didn't have scrub clothes at that time for nurses. You wore a white uniform every day to the OR. I had a habit of somehow getting blood all over myself when I was giving blood. A bag of blood would get messy and I'd get it all over my uniform. Finally, one day I went down to the chief nurse's office with this bloody uniform on and I told her I was just an ensign and I was having to wear sometimes two or three uniforms a day. I thought that perhaps she would order some scrub dresses for the nurses up there because the operating room nurse wouldn't order them. So the chief nurse gave an order to get scrub dresses for all the females in the OR.

When did you get those new set of orders?

That was in '49. They were to Oakland, CA.

You could do that then? You could go to the Bureau and have your orders changed?

No. You weren't supposed to. And then the chief nurse found out about it and gave me heck for going down there. But it all worked out. I went to Oakland and from then on I liked the Navy.

How was Oakland different from Bethesda?

It was a big department and everyone got big cases as well as small ones. It was a bit of everything--orthopedics, neurosurgery, general surgery, ENT.

This about 1950 and the Korean War was ready to get underway.

We got a few patients who were brought in to Oakland who had frostbite from Korea. I gave a few anesthetics to those patients for amputations and that sort of thing. In late '50 I got orders to Mare Island at Vallejo, the submarine base. I was there a year and then got orders to Guantanamo Bay in December 1951.

So you were only at Mare Island for a year. How did you like that assignment?

It was great. Every other afternoon when I didn't have the duty--anesthesia call--I'd get in my little car and drive out to the Napa Valley to some little restaurant and have a nice little supper and then head back to the quarters. I got to go out on a submarine one day. We were on top of the water going out under the San Francisco Bridge, then submerged, had lunch down below, and then came back into Mare Island. It was a great little trip.

Were you there when the *Benevolence* sank?

I was at Oakland when it sunk. And I had anesthesia call that night. We heard about it. And then we didn't get any patients for hours. I finally said to the CO, who had come into the hospital. I told him I had the anesthesia call but we didn't have any patients. How about if I could go over in case some of the nurses might need a female to help them when they came out of that water. He told me to get the next ambulance going and to be on my way.

We went across that Bay Bridge at a hundred miles an hour. I was scared spitless and I swore I'd never get in another ambulance like that again. But we waited a good 2 hours before we even got the first nurse in from the sunken vessel. The one girl from Texas had died in the water--[Wilma] Ledbetter. I knew one of the nurses, [Dorothy] Venverloh, who was on the ship. That was my trip across the bay.

What a change it must have been to go from Oakland to Gitmo.

I was the only anesthetist and I also was given the duties of being the SOQ [Sick Officers' Quarters] nurse. And I was also in charge of the diet kitchen.

You had no training in that, did you?

No, but I certainly learned fast. The nice thing about the diet kitchen was the Cuban who was so nice and she could really cook. She would ask me what I would like to have and then would cook up good food for me. Because I didn't always like what we had in the nurses' quarters, I didn't mind that little extra duty at all.

I played golf every single day after I got off duty. On weekends, one of the other nurses and I . . . On Sundays, Father Spinney would come out to the golf course after he finished his church duties and we'd play 18 or 27 holes with Father Spinney. And then we'd go to the nurses' quarters and clean up, and he'd go to his quarters and clean up, and then we'd meet back at the O Club for dinner. After dinner, we'd go across the street where the bowling alley was and we'd bowl three games and then that would be our Sunday with Father Spinney.

So, you got your religion on the golf course.

Yes. Well, it was really good because I never learned to do any cussing when I hit bad balls or anything like that because of Father Spinney. And to this day, I never use bad language on a golf course where a lot of people do.

At that time, Cuba was quite a different place than it is now. Did you ever get to Havana and do those kinds of things?

No. I got to Haiti one day for a few hours. A plane was going over so I went along. We toured where they made all the mahogany bowls and platters. We had lunch up in the hills at a hotel called the Ibaleli. Otherwise, we could go outside the gate. There was a wide place in the road called . . . I can't remember. Anyway, it was the town when the sailors would come in off the ships, they'd all go to that wide place in the road. That's where all the prostitutes were.

One day I walked upstairs to an office where the officer in charge . . . He would go out there and make sure that the prostitutes were all clean without any venereal diseases. And he had a picture of every one of those prostitutes on a bulletin board so that he could check them every so often. I'm telling you, I've never seen such horrible looking people in my life. To think that those 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old sailors were just dying to get out there to one of those horrible looking people. It was pathetic. I'm a female so I don't understand the thoughts of males.

So, even back in 1950-51, even though Castro wasn't in power yet, you didn't have the run of Cuba. You couldn't just go where you wanted. You were pretty much confined to the base.

Twice a week, they had a plane that would go into Miami and pick up milk and things like that.

Was there anything about that assignment that was memorable?

There was an underground hospital there that if and when there'd be a hurricane, they'd send all the pregnant women down there.

Where did you go after Gitmo?

By then, Winnie Gibson was Director of the Nurse Corps. I got a set of orders to San Diego but, in the meantime, on my way there, I was to stop in Pensacola and relieve in the department because the nurse anesthetist was on sick leave for 3 months. So I stayed in Pensacola for 3 months and then went on to San Diego.

Was San Diego a dream assignment kind of place?

Yes. While I was at Pensacola, the doctor in charge of the operating room was a great golfer. I told him that I played every day down in Gitmo. So he said, "Well, maybe you'd like to join the country club so you can play over there." So he signed me up so that I could get to join a country club that was close to the base. And I got to play golf there. On Wednesdays, he gave me a half day off and the PT a half day off and the two of us got to go out and play golf. That was his day to play golf.

I've talked to other nurses who were stationed at San Diego when they called it the "Pink Palace." They all say of all the places they were, that was the most beautiful and most enjoyable assignment. Was that the same for you?

Yes.

How long were you there?

Two years. It was a big department. I guess there were four nurses and five or six doctors. And it was very enjoyable. Of course, the area around San Diego was enjoyable. When I reported into the quarters I ended up moving right next door to Bobbi and that's how we got acquainted.

And that's when she bought her little Porsche and we used to toodle around San Diego in that and drive to Escondido and Mt. Tamilpais and places like that. I got promoted, while I was at San Diego, to lieutenant. Then we decided that we should go to Hawaii and celebrate that promotion so we took leave and flew over to Hawaii. She knew the priest who was there at the base. She had been stationed with him down at Jacksonville. We then got a hop to the Big Island and walked to the volcano. I remember Bobbi asking the man, "How can you tell when there's going to be an eruption?"

He said, "We've got all kinds of instruments here that tell us when that's going to happen."

And she said, "Any time soon?"

And he said, "Oh, no."

That night, we heard all this explosion and the people hollering and screaming. We all got up. Kiluea is erupting. And we had walked on the bottom of that floor that afternoon. It was like daylight with that thing erupting. The man in charge of the R & R center said, "Would you girls want to ride around. I'm going to drive around and circle the volcano to take a look." So we jumped in his car and we got to ride around and see the other side. Bobbi took pictures with daylight film and they came as clear as you ever saw.

How long were you in San Diego?

From '53-'55. Since Bobbi and I were doing things together, we decided to ask for orders together. Well, here came orders to Pax River. So we went there and had the nicest CO. He said, "Tweedie, I don't expect you to be here day and night and weekends. If my surgeons have to operate and they can't do a spinal, they can send the patients to Bethesda for surgery. You take your weekends off."

So, we did a lot of camping and then we did a lot of driving around and sightseeing and going to Washington. That same CO ended up in Kodiak when we were in Adak, Alaska.

How long were you at Pax?

The working conditions were good, and we were there about 2 years. From '55-'57 we were at Pax River. In '57 we got orders to Oakland. It was my second tour and Bobbi's first. It was good for me because I ended up as senior anesthetist. The operating room nurse had been in San Diego and we were friends. We ended up moving to the same compound where she and her mother were living. That was good duty. We'd go to baseball and football games in San Francisco. On Sundays we would go to Sausalito and have a big breakfast and read the papers, then head for San Francisco. That was good duty.

From Oakland, we got orders to Adak. Bobbi had a bird, a parakeet. She bundled that little bird up in its cage and then put it in an AWOL bag and away we went.

How did you get there?

We had to go to Seattle to catch the plane. We got in and there was going to be a football game on Saturday. We were scheduled to go out on Friday or Saturday. So Bobbi negotiated so we could stay the weekend, go to the game, and then go out on a later flight . So she got us delayed and we were at the BOQ in Seattle. The whole football team from the University of Washington came that night to have their dinner at the O club. The plane that we were supposed to be on crashed into a mountain out in Alaska and it had a million dollar payroll on it for the Navy. We would have been on that plane if we hadn't gone to that football game.

And then there was Adak. It was a little hospital and I had charge of the operating room and the OB department, and anesthesia. I was relieving an anesthetist I had duty with at my first duty station at Oakland, Theresa Butler, who later set up the anesthesia program for Navy nurses at Bethesda.

We were assigned half of a Quonset hut--two bedrooms, a living room, and a bathroom. And that little old thing was so warm because the heater was in the bathroom. We were right across the street from the big BOQ where we had our meals. In the chief nurse's quarters, she had a kitchen so at times, we would use that kitchen to cook a special dinner and invite guests in.

We did a year out there and then went to Quantico. When we were ready to leave Adak, I had had ear problems. I said to Bobbi, "Maybe I shouldn't fly and we will go back with the Seabees when they go back to San Francisco on the ship." So we made arrangements to go back on the ship and that was the worst thing I ever did. I was seasick 30 minutes after I got aboard, and was in bed the rest of the time. Bobbi would come each meal and drag me down to the dining room and I'd eat, then I'd go back and go to bed. It must have been have those diesel fumes. A dentist was so sick, he never got out of bed and needed IVs.

Quantico was a nice duty station. That was from '61 to '63. All those enlisted Marines had motorcycles and they'd get snockered and then have wrecks. There were more wrecks on Route 1 and I spent lots of time in the operating room at night with those drunk Marines.

The first snowstorm of the season came and the captain came up to the operating room and said, "Which one of you has the duty?"

"I do," I said.

"Well, you had better go home and pack a bag, then come back because whenever there's snow, Rita can never get in." I looked at him and said, "Captain, I've got a Volkswagen. I have never been called when I couldn't get in to do a case. And I only live two blocks off the base."

So I convinced him that I was going to stay home until I got called. Well, the next time, Rita had the call. So, the next morning she called in and said she couldn't make it; there was too much snow. I said, "Rita, get your coat. I'm on my way to pick you up." And I got in my little Volkswagen and it was a sunny day with no snow on the roads. They'd been plowed. But she didn't want to go in. It wasn't that she couldn't get in.

Well, I drove up to her house and she got in the car. I had already decided that I wasn't taking her home. She could get someone else to take her home. And that was the last time she tried that one.

How did the deal with Vietnam come about?

When Rita left, they sent a doctor. He had just finished his residency and he was there a few months and he said, "I'd like to go to another hospital where there are more big cases, more neuro and more of this and that." Finally one day I told him to go down to the detailer in the Bureau and talk to him about getting orders. I was so aggravated at him that I was hoping the detailer would transfer him.

He came back and said, "I can't get orders because there's some place called Saigon that they said, if I don't go, then they're going to give orders to you." I looked at him and said, "Where?"

"Saigon."

Well, I didn't know what Saigon was. I'll tell you that much. I had always kept track of all the hospitals in the personnel office, and I knew the anesthetists at most of these places. And I just laughed at him and walked away.

Well, sure enough, here came the orders. And I didn't know what this Saigon bit was. I called the detailer at the Bureau, Romaine Mensher and asked if I could come and talk to her. She said yes. When I got there I said, "I just got back from Adak 2 years ago. Why do I have new orders now?"

She said, "When I was down there on inspection, I thought you were doing a good job with the operating room and I also knew you had put corpsmen in the emergency room for their sterile technique. Well, they need to open a new hospital in Vietnam and I figured you were the best one to go."

I said, "Bobbi Hovis told me to tell you that if you had another billet, that she would volunteer for that billet."

So she said, "Well, I figured she would so I have a billet and that billet will be hers." So that's how we both ended up going at the same time.

Most people didn't even know where Vietnam was.

I didn't, but Bobbi did. She had been in the Far East before. "Oh, that's the greatest place; I want to go. I can learn so much."

I didn't figure that I was going to be at the top of the world, but we went.

How did you get to Vietnam?

We had a house we had bought in Quantico. We stored our stuff real fast and we rented the house out to two sisters who were Navy nurses. And they were in that house the whole time we were in Vietnam. When we came back, we sold it. This was in August of '63.

I figured that since we were setting up a new hospital, I packed a footlocker full of anesthesia gear since it was already paid for by the military. At that time, all anesthetists had a fishing tackle box full of equipment. Every time we went to an operating room we took that box and you could always carry it around from patient to patient.

What kind of stuff did you have in there?

Laryngoscopes, tubes, pediatric equipment and tubes, blades, a few syringes, medications--curare and that sort of thing. I had all the information for anesthesia equipment to be ordered from other than the supply catalog, if I needed it.

We then checked in to take the plane and everybody's saying to me, "You're a real fisherman. You're taking your fishing gear with you." And I said, "No. This is for putting people to sleep equipment."

The footlocker came fairly fast so I had a bunch of spinal trays and things like that so that I could order more from the supply catalog. So I had all the stuff I needed to take care of the first patient who came in.

Did they brief you at all on what the hospital in Saigon was like?

Not till we got there. The Bureau told me nothing but that it was going to be a new hospital. I did end up with a new building. It wasn't the old wreck of a building that the rest of the hospital was. It was a little tin building nearby. Half of it was the emergency room and the other half was my operating room. I had two lights, two tables, two gas machines in case I ever had to give two anesthetics at once. I'd have the tables head by head and the gas machines at the head of each table. But I never had two patients at one time.

What kind of machines were they? Were they Bird machines?

Oh, no. I ordered a Bird machine when I got out there and it came in 2 weeks before I left a year later.

When you got to Vietnam, did you land in Saigon?

We first landed in Okinawa in the middle of the night for 2 or 3 hours. Our next stop was Vietnam. When we got off that plane, the heat just hit us. It was hot. The chief nurse had written, telling us to bring shoes two sizes larger than what we usually wore because our feet would be so swollen from the heat.

We wore what nurses wore at that time, the gray seersuckers. We wore white uniforms when on duty. I had scrub dresses. I had eight corpsmen. Not all of them were techs. Some were being trained on the job. Besides the operating room, I had the emergency room. I had to order supplies for those two rooms as well as supplies for the hospital because I had CSR

(Central Supply). For the cast room, we had an old empty wooden box that the patient would sit on and the corpsman would sit on another box to put a cast on. There was no protection if it was raining, and if you wanted to put a cast on, it had to be done out in the open.

At one time [Robert] McNamara came through and decided that we didn't need all the personnel at the hospital. So I lost two or three more techs and had to get on the job trainees and teach them OR and sterile technique. All this took place outside the main hospital.

When you got to Saigon, had the old apartment building that was being used for the hospital been made shipshape?

Are you kidding? The nurses and corpsmen had to clean that whole thing. I was lucky because the building was pretty clean but every morning, the first thing my corpsmen did was field day. Every single morning, they held field day so we had no dust and that sort of thing in case we got emergencies in.

What was a typical day like for you at the hospital? You didn't live on the premises.

No. We traveled by car. There was a nurses' car with a driver. He would pick us up in the morning and take us to the hospital. The nurses would go to their stations and I would go back to the OR-Emergency Room. Then he would pick us up and take us back for lunch at our BOQ. He took the junior nurses to the other BOQ. Then he'd pick us up and take us back to the hospital for the rest of the day. At the end of the day, he'd take us all back to our BOQs. Whenever they needed me, they would call and tell me that they were sending the car to pick me up.

We had guards around our BOQ. There were also guards around the hospital. I would have to check on what supplies were needed and order those supplies. I had to make sure we had enough instruments that had been run through the autoclave and replace anything that had been used. I had to keep books up to date on every case we did and had to keep my anesthesia record current.

How many surgeons were you working for?

When we first got there we had an orthopod who had some neuro training. We had two general surgeons and the rest of them were young doctors with no specialties. The Chief of Surgery was one of the nicest and best surgeons I've ever worked with. Then we got Dr. Zuckerman. Then there were these other young doctors that if they wanted scrub in, they might help out.

What was a typical patient load on a given day? Were you seeing many casualties at this point?

No. We started in October. Here's what my log says: Gunshot wound of the buttocks; wound of the abdomen and right upper arm; hemorrhoids; debridement of left arm, upper and lower; anal fissure; varicose veins; mass of the left breast. For that month, we had a total of 9 cases--7 military, 2 civilians, and no dependents. I administered 5 generals (anesthesia) and 4 spinals. In November we had a total of 23 cases--23 military, no civilian, and no dependents. I administered 6 generals, 7 spinals, 8 locals, and 2 axillary blocks.

I went back through the whole book and it's about half and half general anesthesia and spinal anesthesia.

Would the general anesthesia have been pentothal?

Yes. Pentothal induction and then nitrous oxide and oxygen and muscle relaxants, if needed.

Would you have used curare for the muscle relaxant?

I would have used anectine. At that time, we were using more anectine than curare. It was a newer drug.

What was your most memorable patient that you had there?

The daughter of what at that time was the latest president of Vietnam. He was Gen. [Nguyen] Khanh. The captain called me and Bobbi in because, of all those nurses, Bobbi had more experience in the operating room. If I knew I had a big case, I would ask Bobbi to come and circulate.

The captain called us in and told us that the president's daughter was coming in for surgery for a hemangioma on her face. There was a plastic surgeon who going to be in Vietnam and he was asked to come and operate on this little girl.

I went up the afternoon before to talk to the mother and tell her what I'd be doing for the little girl. I told her I'd be starting an intravenous and I'd use a little needle that would feel about like a mosquito bite. I'd put that in and tape it down and start IV fluids. And when I was ready to put her to sleep, I was going to give her some pentothal so that she'd just drift off to sleep rather than putting a mask on her face and trying to give her some gas. I also told her that I would put a tube down her trachea so that I would have control of her respiration through the whole surgery. I would put a blood pressure cuff on her arm and a stethoscope that would be taped to her chest.

The morning of the surgery, I went up and took a corpsman with me. We didn't try to take a gurney because the way that hospital was--up steps and down steps and what have you--it was impossible to take a gurney to and from that little girl's room. She was in a room about the size of a closet.

So my corpsman picked her up and carried her in his arms down to the operating room. In the meantime, the general had brought in about 17 of his own special guards to guard the hospital. I thought nothing of it.

I began talking to the little girl, telling her stories about dogs and cats and this and that, knowing that she didn't understand a thing I was saying. But I just wanted her to hear my voice all the time. I did the induction, put the endotracheal tube in her, taped it down, and moved my gas machine so I wouldn't be in the way of the doctor.

And then I waited. I thought, "Well, it's been long enough that the doctor should be coming out of the room. And I looked over toward the scrub room, which had half glass at the top. I didn't see the doctor coming. What I saw were three of the president's guards, each with a rifle in his hand, and watching every move I was making. No one told me they were going to be there so it was rather a shock. Immediately I said to Bobbi, "Bobbi, you had better say a fast prayer because if anything happens to this kid, we're dead ducks. Look toward the door."

Years later I thought the reason that doctor wasn't coming in as fast, was, he probably was wondering what in the world he'd gotten himself into.

Well, I didn't look over there again and then when the doctor had finished and left, I said to Bobbi, "I'm staying right here until this kid wakes up completely because I'm not having those guys follow me and put a bullet in my head." So I kept that little girl in the operating room

until she woke up. I pulled the endotracheal tube out and gave her some oxygen, and checked her pulse. I probably kept her there a half an hour. And then the corpsman picked her up and brought her back to her room. I talked to the mother and told her that everything went fine and that she was a good little patient. According to my log, it was March the 4th, '64. She was 6 years old.

About 2 weeks later, Mrs. Khanh phoned the chief nurse inviting her to bring all the Navy nurses out to the house for tea. So we had tea and cookies and then she went into another room and brought out all these silk blouses and gave each nurse a silk blouse for taking care of her little girl.

So, it was a successful operation and you all lived.

Yes. But that was a real shocker when I looked up and saw those guys with those guns.

Anything else about that tour in Vietnam that sticks in your mind?

Yes. We always marched with the Vietnam group here in Annapolis when it was organized. I was sitting in the car and Bobbi was off talking to somebody. A man came up to the car and said, "You gave me an anesthetic for surgery in Saigon."

And I said, "For what?"

He told me that the priest had given him last rites twice. I asked him when this happened. He said July something. And I told him that I had not given him an anesthetic. He must have been at another hospital.

"No," he said, "I was at your hospital."

Well, I came home and got the book and opened it to the date he said. He was operated on in our hospital but I did not give that anesthetic. The Air Force anesthetist gave it because we were in Hong Kong.

It's amazing that you have that book so you could do that.

Yes.

Do you remember any other patients, in particular?

I remember the Hawaiian boy. Bobbi used his picture in the book. Ken was in the same helicopter group that John Givhan was in and they were in the same battle.

They were both Army.

Yes.

Did you see a lot of Army patients?

Most of the patients there were Army. There were very few Navy at that time. I do remember a Marine captain. And the reason I remember him . . . His dad was a Marine general and he had an injury to his ankle. The doctors tried to manipulate that ankle to fix it and couldn't. So they had to go in an do an open reduction. I gave him a spinal and sat there and chatted. I told him I had been stationed at Quantico. He was so upset. "I just know I'm not going to be kept in the Marine Corps with this injury." I tried to cheer him up. I never have gotten to talk to any Marine that knew him and if he got to stay in the Marine Corps.

One day, right after lunch, a child was brought in. The mother had put him in the car and somehow or another, he had one of his fingers practically cut off in the door. The doctor needed

to sew the end of that finger back on. The one thing you don't want to do is give a kid with a full stomach a general anesthetic. So I told the mother why I didn't want to give him a general anesthetic, that he might vomit and aspirate. I said, "If you will help me, I am sure that I can do a brachial block--just put a needle into the skin--near some nerves--put in the anesthetic and it will spread and numb that hand. You just talk to him while I put in the needle. When I hit that nerve, he will jump and that's when I'll put in the anesthetic."

I did that and it wasn't very long before he was numb and got the end of his finger sewed back on. But that was the good thing about an axillary block.

Was he a Vietnamese child?

No. He was American. There were some American Navy dependents. Those little Vietnamese boys we kept so long. Oh, they liked staying in that hospital.

Why were they in the hospital? Are they the ones who had been injured in a terrorist bombing?

It was a terrorist who had thrown a bomb. They liked the American corpsmen and the good food and didn't want to leave.

You were there during the unrest.

Oh, yes. I have to tell you one thing. When the Diem government was overthrown, there were uprisings in the city and what have you. I said to Bobbi, "If I get a call to the hospital, I'm not going out in the street with them turning cars over and setting fires, killing people." Wouldn't you know it, I got a call from the hospital. It was the orthopod. He said, "I've got a patient here with a broken arm."

I said, "Well, I'm gonna tell you something. We were just up on the roof watching everything that's going on, and I'm not about to get into a car and try to get to that hospital. I'm sure you can give him some sedation and we can do it tomorrow if we have to. But I'm not coming in to give him an anesthetic for a broken arm." And I didn't go. And that's probably the only time I ever refused to go.

This was doing the coup episode when Diem was overthrown.

Yes.

So you were in Vietnam until '64?

Yes. We came back in August of '64.

Did you go back to Quantico?

No. I went to Portsmouth, VA, to take charge of the student nurse anesthetists. There were four students. There were going to be three hospitals--Portsmouth, Great Lakes, and Chelsea up in Boston. Two of the anesthetists were already in on this program so they were going to stay where they were. Therefore, Theresa Butler, who had set up the program, said, "Tweedie, will go to Chelsea."

I said, "I will not go to Chelsea. I'm not going up there not knowing who the anesthesiologist is, not knowing the hospital. It's not fair for me to go up there and try to get along with the anesthesiologist and make sure that they get everything they need. I might not get good cooperation.

So they fiddled around and sent the students up there without a nurse in charge. They asked the anesthesiologist up there if he would make sure that the girls got what they needed. Well, I sort of snickered to myself and thought that this was there way of getting even with me.

But then when I was leaving Vietnam, I get orders to go to Portsmouth to take over the nurse anesthetist program.

Did you retire from Portsmouth?

Yes.

What year was that?

I came back in '64 and retired in '68.

It's been a long time since you served in Vietnam. Do you ever think about that time?

Not really. I think about our cooks and the maid and wonder what happened to them. They were lovely people. There were a lot of nice people who worked at the hospital. They loved the Americans but hated the regimes they had been going through.

So, considering what happened in Vietnam and that the war turned out badly, you wonder what became of those people?

They could have been shot or anything else for working for us. You just never knew but hoped for the best.

I felt I gave a lot of good anesthesia and I helped a lot of people. A lot of good came from what I did.